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ABSTRACT

Faculty at McNeese State University (Louisiana) and local civic, educational, and cultural groups encouraged their community to commemorate the anniversary of the births of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, German scholars who recorded fairy tales, myths, legends, and folk songs that are now an important part of the western world's cultural heritage, through a series of programs and performances. First, interested collaborators were located in the community and in national organizations. Brainstorming was used to identify potential projects, which then were accomplished separately. A newsletter for communication of involved individuals provided information exchange, moral support, and program momentum. Stories were written for the local media for publicity, enhancing coverage. Participants were given both public and individual recognition for project completion, and awards were given to main organizers. The main projects were: a successful school system-wide reading project organized by librarians, including a reading challenge and series of creative literature-based activities; German cultural activities in many schools; art projects involving professional artists and children of all ages; and public play productions. The celebration reached many segments of the community through creative and enjoyable activities, achieving more than its original goal, and will be expanded to other cultural topics in the future. (MSE)

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Brothers Grimm Bicentennial: Blueprint for A Community Celebration

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The years 1985-86 marked the 200th anniversary of the births of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, two German scholars who recorded fairy tales, myths, legends, and folk songs. Germans and Americans alike cherish memories of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel, the Bremen Town Musicians, and many other fairy tales which now constitute an important aspect of the cultural heritage of the Western World.

Germanists often deplore the decreasing interest in German language study and try various approaches to change this situation. However, they tend to overlook the possibility of reaching out into the non-German-speaking community with German cultural programs. Interest in the German language will increase naturally when there is greater public awareness and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of the German-speaking world. Based on the surprisingly positive response in our community to a Brothers Grimm project, other foreign language teachers are urged to share their knowledge and expertise with local educators, librarians, artists, and musicians. The Grimm Brothers' fairy tales offered a wonderful opportunity for opening a dialogue and entering into meaningful collaboration with different segments of the community. In this paper the author will share her experience with this project and will provide a kind of blueprint for planning similar projects elsewhere. She will also point out possibilities for broadening the subject to conduct educational programs for different cultures and other foreign languages.

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Where to Begin

In order to encourage our community to commemorate the anniversary, a network of interested parties was set up which created programs in a number of areas: reading of the fairy tales; arts and crafts; stage, puppet, and pantomime performances; dances; and German cultural projects. The public and private sectors, the educational establishment, and civic organizations were involved.

The first task was to locate individuals besides Germanists who shared an interest in either fairy tales or in the cultural and educational merits of the project. In other words, collaborators and fellow workers were needed in order to achieve success. German students and friends were the first to be recruited. Later the following people and organizations were identified:

1. Librarians and their organizations, such as the Reading Council;
2. Educators: school supervisors for social sciences, art education, and music; individual teachers and principals;
3. Theatre groups in the community;
4. Ballet and modern dance groups, and other performing groups;
5. PTA groups;
6. Media people who could help with publicity;
7. Financial sponsors, donors.

In addition, people from McNeese State University, the Council for International Concerns, and the Arts and Humanities Council were approached. They provided support by publicizing our efforts and by duplicating newsletters and other materials. The Goethe Institute, the German Embassy, as well as the German Information Center in New York were also helpful.

Scheduling of Different Activities

1. Meetings. An informal brainstorming session was scheduled for a small group of interested persons in a private home. The group met only

twice more to familiarize additional people with the plans and to start translating ideas into projects. Thereafter the individual projects picked up momentum so rapidly that they began to take on a life of their own. It was therefore decided not to waste time in meetings, but rather to communicate by phone and newsletter.

2. The Newsletter. It is vitally important to keep in touch with other involved individuals for information and moral support. For this purpose, a newsletter was established. It was always informal, short (never over two pages long), included project updates and dates of events, and informed everyone about available resources and resource persons with phone numbers and/or addresses. Of course, it listed the names and phone numbers of project leaders and key people. These letters were sent not only to active participants, but were also used to inform prospective volunteers, the media, or anyone else interested in the Brothers Grimm project. The importance of these regular communiqués for building momentum of the program and for keeping up morale can not be stressed enough.

3. Publicity. It was important to have good publicity for the Bicentennial and for each different project and program. It was possible to achieve good coverage by the local TV station and newspaper by personally writing the stories and submitting the finished articles to the media. It was considered essential not only to give public credit for accomplishments, but also to draw attention to German culture and to educate the public about its rich contributions to our American culture.

A summary of scheduling activities is as follows:

a) Two or three informal brainstorming sessions with at least six persons;
b) Newspaper articles about the project, with a request for volunteers;
c) Regular newsletter updates to all active participants;
d) Letters to the superintendent (request for project approval); to the principals (project information); to supervisors of arts, music education, and social studies;
e) Determination of a good date for asking the Mayor to proclaim a "Brothers Grimm Day" for the community once project scheduling begins;
f) A formal, official letter of appreciation to the organizer, his/her supervisor, and his/her school

superintendent when an individual's project has been completed successfully;

g) A letter to the editor in a newspaper can also provide public recognition;

h) Awards for main organizers if there is a sponsoring agency or a German organization (prizes are sometimes available from individual donors and from the Goethe Institute).

Possible Activities

The projects ranged from performances at the Lake Charles Civic Center by a community theatre group to school projects, including art work in middle and high schools and German folk dance performances by elementary students. The following are the major projects:

1. Reading Projects. A reading project for the school system was the most important and most successful project. It reached thousands of youngsters, created lots of enthusiasm and interest, and generated many related projects. It was organized by the Calcasieu Parish Reading Council, an organization for librarians who were eager contributors. They were familiar with the Brothers Grimm--which even many teachers are not—and they responded enthusiastically to the subject. They were excellent "networkers" and had good communication links throughout the school system. In this project many school librarians transformed not only their libraries into a magic fairy-tale world, but also their entire schools.

What were the special reading projects? For the winter semester, the president of our Reading Council, Dr. Phyllis Cuevas, initiated and coordinated a "Reading Challenge" project for elementary schools: any student who read fifteen or more fairy tales before December 15 received a book mark. Teachers could also read to their classes. Some 7,000 youngsters completed the goal and received a handsome book mark. The total number of participants was even greater than that.

The following spring, the Reading Council sponsored a "Reading on the Mall" project, where school classes could exhibit or perform any project that was based on the reading of a fairy tale: puppet presentations, pantomimes, parades of book characters, choral readings, performances, dancing, arts and crafts, cartoons, and many more. By bringing together the work of many teachers and students, this event was

a highlight in the year's activities and demonstrated the extent to which creative energies had been mobilized by the fairy tales. Many projects were highly original and of excellent quality. They drew a lot of enthusiastic spectators on a busy Saturday in a shopping mall.

2. German Culture Activities. Many schools built study units about Germany around the project. Some elementary schools developed comprehensive schoolwide activities which culminated in excellent public performances and school programs. Ms. Opal Young, the principal of St. Johns Elementary School, for example, included the following in her school's program:

German Culture Activities
- A. Travel kit
- B. Foods
- C. Product map
- D. Pen friends with German students
- E. Booklets
- F. Folk songs
- G. Folk dances
- H. Folk costumes

Grimms' Fairy Tale Activities:
- A. Fairy tales
- B. Art work
  1. Post cards
  2. Wall decorations
  3. Cartoons
- C. Plays
- D. Puppets

These programs were beautifully executed by students and teachers and were enthusiastically received by parents and the public.

3. Art Projects. Artists were very receptive to the topic of German fairy tales and therefore responded enthusiastically. Our arts supervisor, Dr. Daniel Vidrine, took the project into art classes from elementary through high schools. He had hundreds of youngsters of all ages involved in creating art work ranging from bookmarks to puppets and masks to life-sized poster figures. The twenty-five best bookmarks were chosen and reproduced (photocopied on colored poster paper) to be used

as awards for some 7,000 elementary school readers of fifteen fairy tales or more.

4. Public Play Productions. Dr. Susan Kelso, a professor of theatre at McNeese State University, wrote the script for *Grimms' Magic,* a wonderful, original play which introduces young audiences to the Brothers Grimm and some of their fairy tales. The play was produced at the Civic Center before large crowds of spectators, and again in schools and libraries by MSU students. Other public performances included a Hansel and Gretel Opera, the Pied Piper of Hamlin ballet, fairy tales as a Mardi Gras Krewe's theme, and others. None of the latter had been initiated by the original organizers, but were generated by the growing interest and enthusiasm for the fairy tales. For the Bicentennial organizers this was a most rewarding, welcome spin-off and a good indication of the success of our efforts.

Conclusions

The Brothers Grimm Bicentennial celebrations reached many sectors of our community, thus achieving much more than our original goal had entailed. Education came alive when the participants enjoyed what they were doing and had a chance to get creatively involved. Organizers, performers, audiences, and students in the fairy tale projects exuded sheer fun and enthusiasm. What better way of learning—and learning about German culture—could there be! It is the hope of the author that some readers will be inspired to follow this example and lead their community to a similarly rewarding learning adventure. One need not wait for the tricentennial for a Grimm Brothers project. Fairy tale programs can be celebrated anytime. More important, however, is the fact that such a collaborative cultural project is so stimulating and valuable to the community that it begs to be continued and expanded into different cultures. For instance, this year the Lake Charles community collaborated to sponsor programs on the European Mediterranean countries: Spain, France, Italy, and Greece. Next year's topic will be the British Isles, and after that Black Africa. Since these community-wide programs are becoming so popular, long-range plans are being formulated to cover the major cultures of the world over the course of several years. The Grimm Brothers Bicentennial clearly shows how very valuable joint projects and cooperative ventures between educational and community organizations can be. Viel Spass und guten Erfolg!